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CC:
Subject: Dimock article

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Drilling

Pennsylvania Asks for Role in EPA Survey Of Tainted Water Wells Near Drilling Sites

PHILADELPHIA—The Environmental Protection Agency should involve state experts in its investigation of water wells in Dimock, Pa., where contamination was linked to natural gas drilling in 2009, to avoid the “deficiencies” of EPA's recent probe into a tainted aquifer in Pavillion, Wyo., Pennsylvania Environmental Secretary Michael Krancer told EPA Jan. 5.

EPA began a door-to-door survey of residential water wells in Dimock Township Dec. 29, prompted by new information the agency received from Dimock residents in the weeks after its November 2011 finding that private well water in the township posed no immediate health risks.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection wants to ensure EPA considers the technical data the DEP has amassed and the enforcement actions it has taken since 2009, when it held Houston-based Cabot Oil & Gas Corp. responsible for high methane levels in some Dimock Township water wells, Krancer said in a [letter](#) to EPA Mid-Atlantic Regional Administrator Shawn M. Garvin.

Emotion, Publicity Cloud Understanding

Krancer said EPA's understanding of the technical facts and enforcement history relative to Dimock is “rudimentary” and that the situation in the township is highly emotional because of conflict between neighbors, pending personal injury litigation, and attention from publicity-seeking politicians, celebrities, and activists.

“I hope that the EPA will be willing to work together with the Pennsylvania DEP to move your research there forward in a cooperative, logical, and scientific manner,” Krancer wrote. “We in Pennsylvania would like to see your efforts at EPA with respect to this be based on cooperative, fully science-based, and peer reviewed analysis.”

Krancer asked that the federal agency's efforts be guided by “sound science and the law instead of emotion and publicity.”

Environmental Impact of Fracking

The use of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing to release natural gas trapped in shale deposits, which has become widespread in recent years, is controversial because of uncertainty about its potential environmental impact.

In a draft report issued Dec. 8, 2011, EPA said the synthetic chemicals and high levels of benzene and methane it found in drinking water and monitoring wells in Wyoming's Pavillion area were "likely associated with gas production practices, including hydraulic fracturing" (237 DEN A-15, 12/9/11). That report represents the first time federal regulators have linked fracking to groundwater contamination. Critics, including Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead (R), said EPA's data were insufficient to draw conclusions and called for further study.

Now EPA is looking at Dimock, where the state DEP concluded in 2009 that methane migrating through defective cement and casings in some of Cabot's wells contaminated 19 households' drinking water wells.

Images of tap water in a Dimock home being ignited with a match were immortalized in the antifracking film Gasland.

Cabot denied responsibility, but under a 2010 settlement of the alleged violations, the company agreed to fund an escrow account of at least \$50,000 for each property and to supply potable water and gas mitigation systems to the affected properties until the escrow accounts were established and funded (241 DEN A-10, 12/17/10).

Potable Water Deliveries Halted

The water deliveries stopped Nov. 30, based on a determination by the DEP that Cabot had satisfied the conditions of the settlement, and the owners of the affected water wells are irate.

According to EPA Region 3 spokesman David Sternberg, Dimock residents recently provided the agency with hundreds of pages of Cabot data.

"While EPA is not in a position to make any conclusions about the data we have in hand because there are gaps, we believe that additional information is needed to better understand the situation in Dimock and respond appropriately," Sternberg said in an e-mail.

The agency said it is concerned about potential gaps in sampling and sample results, the number of drinking water wells that may be affected, and whether residents have access to treatment systems or alternative drinking water sources if needed.

EPA is also seeking any additional data residents can provide about the quality of their drinking water and technical information on each well, including the depth, age, maintenance history, and recent test results.

It began visiting Dimock residences Dec. 29 to gather information and to ask residents to complete a well survey. What happens next depends on what EPA learns, Sternberg said.

If EPA opts to collect and evaluate samples from private drinking water wells, it will share results with the residents, the state, and Cabot, Sternberg said.

By Lorraine McCarthy

http://news.bna.com/delIn/DELNWB/split_display.adp?fedfid=24204162&vname=dennotallissues&fn=24204162&jd=a0d0f9h6t8&split=0

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Only four types of organizations need to worry about data quality:

- Those that care about their customers,
- Those that care about profit and loss,
- Those that care about their employees, and
- Those that care about their futures.

– Thomas C. Redman (2006)